

College Heads Differ About Intelligence of Students

Most of Them Declare Boys of To-day Are as Bright as Those of Past, Despite Dr. Hall's Criticism

A STATEMENT like the one made by Dr. Hall is of so widespread interest that THE NEW YORK HERALD in order to determine whether or not his conclusion applies generally addressed an inquiry to some twenty presidents of leading colleges. The questions in brief were: Is the American college student of to-day mentally inferior to the student of the last generation? Is he as ambitious and hard working? Does he take as high scholastic rank? And if the answers to these questions are negative, is the growth of wealth in the country responsible for a deterioration of mental fibre, the dulling of ambition and the lessening of a willingness to work?

From replies received THE NEW YORK HERALD has culled for publication the following:

It is my impression that the college student of to-day is just as intelligent as the college student of the past, and has more acquaintance with the world in general. Probably he is not as ambitious or as hard working. He more easily gives up a hard problem and does not perhaps stick to it as well. Forty or fifty years ago most boys who went to college had a pretty definite purpose in view and took their college education perhaps more seriously; but I am very sure that the undergraduate of to-day is no worse than his fathers, probably much better.

Kenneth C. M. Sells
President of Bowdoin College.

In answer to your inquiry of Dec. 14 I would say, in comparing the American college student of to-day with the student of fifty years ago, we must remember that the students of fifty or one hundred years ago represented for the most part a single section of the community, usually the professional class. Mechanics and artisans did not then send their sons to college, and those young men who did enter college usually came from homes with libraries and music and cultural background.

The college to-day does not represent any single class. It is a cross section of our entire American life. Undoubtedly the college is less literary than when it belonged to a single class or trained men for only three or four callings. "The quiet and still air of delightful studies" no longer describes the eager and "hustling" life of the college student.

But while the students have lost in some directions they have gained in others. The student of to-day is more ambitious than the student of the last generation and does harder work, even though the work be of a different kind. He takes just as high rank in his classes as did the student of fifty years ago, though the range of subjects in which he is interested is quite different. In any good college one can see the lights burning till after midnight in many a laboratory, and students taking field trips in geology or botany or engineering which occupy a half day or even a whole day. The students in scientific courses work far harder than their fathers did before them, because the courses are far more interesting and far more vitally related to life. The students of to-day are of a more vigorous type, physically and intellectually, than in any preceding generation, even though certain cultural values we often miss.

The publications issued by the students are able than those of fifty years ago, their dramatic productions are much finer, their athletic sports are cleaner, and the college songs of to-day are vastly superior to the drinking songs or the senseless ditties current in the last generation.

The growth of wealth in this country has not appreciably affected the situation. There are a few glided youths concentrated in a few colleges, but nine-tenths of the college students are in modest circumstances—hard working, open minded, steady in purpose and improving their opportunities. We have no reason to be discouraged.

W. H. P. Saunce
President of Brown University.

REPLYING to yours of the 14th inst., which came during my absence from town, I have only your letter advising me that the chancellor of Washington University, St. Louis, stated that "the average intelligence of college students is lower than that which prevailed years ago." I would not, of course, undertake to question Dr. Hall's observation, both because observations differ and I am not sure of the meaning which he attaches to intelligence. Replying to your question, I beg to say briefly that in contrasting the Williams students of to-day with those of my undergraduate years (1881-1885), I believe the net result is a distinct advance. This judgment is based upon consideration of the physical, intellectual and emotional (religious and

moral) training. Concerning the first I am able to speak with accuracy and quote from my annual report of October of the present year:

"Returning graduates frequently remark that the students do not appear to be as robust or physically well developed as during an earlier time. The frequency tables of the height and weight of entering freshmen classes from 1890 to the present time give the following results: The average height of the entering classes from 1890 to 1895, inclusive, was 5 and 65-100 feet; there was a slight falling off during the five years ending with 1900, but a steady gain since that time. The five classes 1916 to 1920, inclusive, average slightly over 5 and 74-100 feet, while the class of 1923 showed an average height of nearly 5 and 77-100 feet. The mean weight of the entering class for the six years 1890 to 1895 was 134.72 pounds. With an insignificant falling off during the next five years, the average weight increased to 140.15 pounds for the classes 1916 to 1920, inclusive, and to 141.12 pounds for the class of 1923."

Whether this physical advance has been secured at the sacrifice of the intellectual is, of course, the main question. Williams still adheres to the humanistic programme of studies. The intellectual outlook is wider than formerly. For many years Greek has not been required, and it is possible for freshmen to substitute physics for mathematics, and they are introduced to the problems of the day. This seems to the classical student an intellectual loss hardly balanced by the gain in interest. With this view I have considerable sympathy, especially when, as in many places, the doors are thrown wide open and the freshmen invited to help himself. But I think we of the '80s must exercise judgment with care lest we fall into the error of identifying change with degeneration. Formerly the emphasis was largely placed on accurate registration of facts and a nice understanding of words and symbols. To-day the emphasis is on their interpretation and use. In other words, the student of to-day is different but not necessarily inferior. Most of them know less Latin and Greek but more modern language. To the group of hard working ambitious students of former times have been added many others, for it is now the thing to go to college. Many who now enter

would have gone into business forty years ago. Lacking intellectual interests, they have initiated campus activities, and a goodly number discover unsuspected intellectual tastes before graduation.

I believe that a larger proportion of Williams men are taught to use their reasoning powers to-day than formerly. It is distinctly to the advantage of business that so many college men are now turning to it. But this will continue to be so only if high standards of character which come from the training of the emotions are maintained. To this end it becomes of first importance that everything that makes against this standard be sternly shut out and that the moral and religious emotions be positively and effectively trained to useful service in the world.

To reply to your last question, without doubt the growth of wealth throughout the country in the last twenty years has had a deteriorating effect upon the fibre of the American youth, because it has set before him standards of material achievement and the allurements of pleasure seeking. But youth is generous minded and with quick perception is seizing upon the idea that respectability and the hard work that sees things through outweigh wealth. I have fully as much faith in the young men of to-day as in those of my own generation.

H. H. L. W. W. W.
President of Williams College.

Dr. Hall has been chancellor of Washington University since 1917. He received his A. B. from Drury College in 1878 and his A. M. from the same college. Tufts gave him L. H. D. in 1912 and Washington University gave him LL. D. in 1913.

Following his graduation by Drury College he studied at Gottingen, Germany. He is the author of "Homeric Studies for Young Readers," "Outline of the Odyssey," "Outline of the Orestian Trilogy" and "Iphigenia in Literature."

Asked to amplify his formal report, Dr. Hall said: "I may say briefly that it is my judgment that the students who have entered colleges this year, and last particularly, do not measure up to the standard of previous groups."

"In the article to which you refer I endeavored to make it clear that, in my judgment, this was partly due to the fact that much greater numbers of young people were entering college, and that in these increased numbers there were naturally many who, under pre-war conditions, might not ever have thought of college."

"Then, too, the unrest brought about by the war has left its impress, not only on older people but on the young, even those who were in the service, showing a lack of purpose in their college work, which was quite surprising. There is an improvement observable this year as to seriousness of purpose, but, like last year, a proportion greater than used to prevail is likely to be unable to do the work required in a college course."

The annual report of Dr. Frederic Aldin Hall, Chancellor of Washington University, contained a statement that the average intelligence of college students is lower than that which prevailed years ago. This conclusion, the report explains, coincides with that of authorities in other educational institutions, as ascertained through correspondence. The actual words in Dr. Hall's report are these:

"It is only fair to say that, so far as I can learn from the faculty, it is thought that the work of the student body has not this year been as good as that of previous years; that, contrary to the people's expectations that the young would be more purposeful and earnest by reason of war experience, they seem to be less inclined to serious labor, and that an unusual proportion of students had to be dropped because of the inferior quality of their work."

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Chancellor of Washington University, Viewing Standards as Lower, Attributes Slump to Effects of War



THE specific questions you ask regarding the average intelligence of college students do not admit of categorical answers. The records of Lafayette College show that in the decade 1870-1880 more high marks were given than in the decade 1910-1920, but it is open to question whether this was due to superior achievements on the part of the students or to a lower standard of requirements on the part of the instructor. In the earlier decade fifty to sixty per cent. of those who entered as freshmen graduated as seniors at the end of the four years; the ratio is slightly lower for the last decade. In 1916, the last year before the war, fifty per cent. graduated. The statistics since the war are, of course, without significance in this connection.

I should not say that the American college student of to-day knows less, or is less able intellectually than his predecessor of a generation ago. It is, however, probably true that he is not, relatively, so far in advance of the average intelligence of his community as he was forty years ago, due in part to the widespread dissemination of knowledge through books and newspapers. Moreover, college life is far more complex to-day than it was in 1880. The college boy has a bewildering array of interests. His life is a much broader one, judged by the activities in which he engages; probably there is too great dissipation of his energies. At all events it makes it exceedingly difficult to compare his achievements with those of the college student of 1880, whose curriculum, as a rule, did not include more than four subjects at a time, when the long hours of personal laboratory experimentation were unknown, and when physical training was just beginning to find recognition as a college department.

Probably a more profitable comparison than that between two generations would

be between the American college man and the student of equal age in Scotland, Sweden or Switzerland. Such a comparison would probably show that the American student is superior in mental alertness and initiative and inferior in exact knowledge of every kind.

The most serious obstacle to scholastic attainment in America to-day is not wealth but the jealousy of democracy which doesn't want anybody to know more than everybody, just as it does not want anybody to own more material things than everybody. This manifests itself in a trade union limitation of output in college boy circles.

We are not so much concerned at Lafayette as to how the average intelligence and application of our college boys compare with the intelligence and application of a former generation as we are with the question whether we can train for the service of the world some leaders who will be better equipped every way than were the leaders of the last generation.

JOHN H. MacCRACKEN.
President of Lafayette College.

I BEG to acknowledge receipt of your inquiry dated Dec. 14 last, addressed to the former provost of the university. Dr. E. F. Smith, and requesting comment upon a recent alleged utterance of the chancellor of Washington University, in St. Louis, with regard to the average intelligence of college students "then and now."

Dr. Josiah H. Penniman, the present acting provost of the university, is a strong believer in the continuing reality of the solid fibre of our American youth and does not believe that the college student of to-day is in any way inferior in intelligence to the students of former generations. To believe this, and to admit it, would simply be to discredit (in his opinion) the results of modern educational efforts to give our college students better facilities than they ever enjoyed in the past.

Harley Woodward
Vice-Provost University of Pennsylvania.

I DO not believe that the average intelligence of college students is lower than that of years ago.

There seems to me to be at the present time a spirit of greater earnestness and seriousness on the part of our students, and better work is done to-day by them at Princeton than I have been able to observe at any time during the last twenty-five years.

John E. H. H.
President of Princeton University.

OUR favor of the 13th is received. My opinion on a matter of that sort can have very little weight, because it is based on no careful study of conditions with a judgment of that sort in view. So far as my personal observations are concerned I do not think there is any material difference between the intelligence and industry of college students some time ago and to-day.

Harry Redford
President of University of Chicago.

MY experience leads me to believe that the American college student of to-day is holding his own. Relatively I think there are as many students making superior grades now as at any time in the history of American education. In more than thirty years experience with college students I have not found a lowering of average intelligence, nor any indication of deterioration in mentality. On the other hand I believe that the standards and requirements of to-day are higher and more severe than they were a generation ago. It seems to me that there is no letting down in the real fibre of American youth. In the crisis he showed all the sterling qualities, courage, endurance and initiative, that have characterized the American from the beginning of our history.

Robert H. H.
President of University of Maine.

Earn \$100 By Writing High School Essay

Chance for Pupils of Graduating Classes in All of New York City's Advanced Schools Offered by This Newspaper

HOW do the boys and girls of the schools regard to-day's vivid and compelling problems and industrial reconstruction and readjustment? What is their attitude as citizens of to-morrow toward the State and to society? What principles of Americanism are being inculcated by the educators of the metropolis? What do the young think of the country in which they live?

These and other questions of live import will be answered through the Economic Essay Contest organized by THE NEW YORK HERALD and approved by Dr. William L. Ettinger, Superintendent of Schools. This is the first public announcement of what authorities on civics consider one of the most interesting and far reaching inquiries into the status of the mind of American youth ever proposed, the pupils having been apprised of the conditions of the contest on the last day of school before the Christmas holidays.

The title of the essay is: "In View of Present Industrial Conditions and Social Unrest, What Are the Obligations Incumbent Upon the American Citizen?"

Terms of the Contest Set Forth

In Letter to High School Principals

In accordance with the terms officially announced, the contest is open to the members of the fourth year classes of all of the high schools of New York City, as set forth in this letter to principals issued by John L. Tildesley, district superintendent for high schools, with the approval of Dr. William L. Ettinger, the City Superintendent of Schools.

For the purpose of interesting the citizens of to-morrow in economic affairs and of stimulating a safe and sane view of citizenship, THE NEW YORK HERALD offers prizes to be competed for by the students of the classes of the fourth year in the high schools of the city of New York, for an essay on the subject: "In View of Present Industrial Conditions and Social Unrest, What Are the Obligations Incumbent Upon the American Citizen?" The prizes are as follows:

First prize.....\$100

Second prize.....50

Third prize.....25

The essays are to be not less than one thousand nor more than two thousand words in length. They are to be written on one side of the paper, preferably typed. They are to be judged by their originality of treatment and by their clearness, conciseness and forcefulness of English style. Allow me to impress upon you that this contest will not entail any additional study on the part of those students who are competing for the Simonds economic prizes. Their study of present economic conditions should already have given them the material needed for the writing of this essay. I trust, therefore, that you will impress upon your teachers of economics, history and civics, and English the desirability of having as large a number as possible of their fourth year students compete for these prizes, as I feel sure that the writing of the essay will tend to make them better prepared for the duties of citizenship which will be incumbent upon them soon after leaving school. Allow me to further remind you that the subject of this

Summary of The New York Herald Economic Essay Contest Conditions

SUBJECT:—"In View of Present Industrial Conditions and Social Unrest, What Are the Obligations Incumbent on the American Citizen?"

PRIZES:—First, \$100; Second, \$50; Third, \$25.

MANUSCRIPT REQUIREMENTS:—Essays to be not less than 1,000 nor more than 2,000 words in length. Written on one side of paper, preferably typed.

TIME LIMITS:—All manuscripts to be in hand not later than Jan. 14, 1921. Awards to be announced in time for the commencement of Jan. 31.

CONTESTANTS:—Competition open to all students in fourth year of the high schools of city of New York.

JUDGES:—Former Judge Alton B. Parker, William Fellowes Morgan and Mrs. Sara A. Conboy.

content is vitally connected with our instruction in civics and economics, and if these subjects have been taught in accordance with the aims of the Board of Superintendents in inaugurating these courses, the pupils should have little difficulty in writing these essays merely from the regular instruction in these subjects.

The essays are to be handed in to the principal of the school on or before January 14, 1921, and are to be forwarded directly by the principal to the Contest Editor, Sunday Department, THE NEW YORK HERALD, 280 Broadway, New York City.

Judges All Specially Qualified

To Decide on Merits of the Essays

The judges who have been selected to serve in the awarding of prizes are: Judge Alton B. Parker, distinguished jurist and authority on civics, New York City; William Fellowes Morgan, president of the Merchants Association of New York City; Mrs. Sara A. Conboy, international secretary-treasurer of the United Textile Workers of America, New York City.

A glance at the names of these judges alone shows how broad is the scope of the inquiry and how comprehensive a treatment may be expected.

The soundness of the legal views and of obligations of citizens under the law would naturally command the strict attention of Judge Parker, who by training and experience has been brought in close contact with the relations of the citizens to the State.

Long Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals, an office which he resigned to become a candidate for President of the United States on the Democratic ticket, Judge Parker has been engaged in recent years in the practice of law. He is deeply interested in economic affairs as shown by his presidency of the National Civic Federation, an organization devoted to adjusting the relations of labor and capital.

Mr. Morgan has had extensive experience as a manufacturer and as an employer of labor, as well as in financial matters. He is in the warehouse business, which brings him in close touch with many commercial interests. His interest in the "training of youth" is revealed as an alumnus trustee of Columbia University and his connection with other institutions of learning.

Mrs. Conboy represents not only the labor view on the board of judges, but also the new class of voters who are now such important factors in all social and political affairs. As many of the contestants will undoubtedly be girls, for the students of the high schools are about equally divided between the sexes, she will be able to understand thoroughly the view of womanhood in the solution of the problems of the present. Mrs. Conboy

Topic of Live Import Sanctioned by Board of Education--Widely Known Persons Consent to Act as Judges in Contest

been an agency of oppression rather than uplifting.

"The loose speaking and often wild speeches of the radicals on our street corners, the hastily devised remedies for social evils which appear so frequently in our newspapers, the general interest of boys and girls of high school age who are in all movements which aim or purport to aim at the improvement of industrial and economic conditions, and who, therefore, are frequently brought into contact with those theories of social amelioration or even social overthrow which are not based on experience and which are not the product of close thinking have brought home to us during the past few years that we have been derailed in our duties as teachers in allowing our boys and girls to be graduated from high schools without such systematic training in economics as to give them some understanding of our industrial conditions, some knowledge of the forces which control men's actions in industry, such training as will keep them from hastily subscribing to half baked theories and from joining in movements which are subversive of the orderly development of society."

"The Board of Superintendents has, therefore, this past year made economics for five periods a year in the fourth year a requirement for graduation from all four year classes and has made it a requirement also for the three year commercial course. All students graduated in 1920 will, therefore, have had a course in economics."

Study of Economics to Begin

With Government of the City

The outlines of study prepared by the Board of Education for the study of economics is regarded by authorities in educational matters as of the highest value. It is the aim of these civic courses to begin with the government of the city itself and gradually to unfold the relations of the local community to the State and the nation.

The Simonds prize to which Mr. Tildesley refers is a contest inaugurated for the benefit of students of all high schools throughout the United States for a special study of the economic theories of Adam Smith, the British economist, which has been supplemented for the benefit of high school pupils in this city by Clarkson Cowell, a well known merchant. Some of the special reading recommended for those taking part in the contest would be of value for the economics prizes offered by THE NEW YORK HERALD.

Pupils who have taken up their high school economics, however, in the regular courses, have an ample foundation for the contest which is now so busily engaging them. The text books and lectures in those courses could well be supplemented by a close reading of the current news and of magazine articles.

The announcement of the terms of THE NEW YORK HERALD contest was received with much enthusiasm by the high school pupils, and many of them have been gathering information during the holiday vacation which comes to its close to-morrow. The indications are that the competition will be the most interesting of the kind ever held in this city and the effort to gain its rewards and honors unquenchably keen.

